

AGENDA: May 25, 2004

7.1

CATEGORY: New Business

DEPT.: Community Services

TITLE: Castro Street Tree Replacement Project

RECOMMENDATION

Approve the following recommendation of the Urban Forestry Board:

1. Authorize the removal and replacement of 170 Idaho locust trees on Castro Street over a two-year period.
2. Select the sycamore (*Platanus acerifolia*), Chinese pistache (*Pistacia chinensis*) and crape myrtle (*Lagerstroemia indica*) as replacement trees for Castro Street.
3. Approve the planting of sycamore trees only on the 100, 200, 300 and 900 blocks and a mixed planting of sycamore, Chinese pistache and crape myrtle trees on the remaining blocks.

FISCAL IMPACT

The estimate for removal and replacement of the 170 Idaho locust trees on Castro Street is \$96,000 or approximately \$565 per tree. The amount includes modifications (and painting) to the tree guards and a small construction contingency. If approved, the project would be funded by the Downtown Revitalization Fund.

BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

The topic of a replacement tree for Castro Street was agendized for discussion at the request of the Urban Forestry Board (Board) on April 9, 2003. At that time, the Board voted unanimously to forward a memorandum to Council proposing the replacement of the trees. The City Council approved the item on May 27, 2003 and referred the selection of a replacement tree and two alternatives, cost estimate and replacement schedule to the Board (Attachment 1).

A staff report and presentation was made to the Board on July 23, 2003. Staff provided information on the environmental impacts the street trees on Castro Street must contend with, including wind and vehicular problems, in addition to criteria for selecting possible replacement trees. Five species of trees were presented to the Board for consideration.

- Sycamore (*Platanus x acerifolia*).
- Chinese pistache (*Pistacia chinensis*).
- Red maple (*Acer rubrum*).
- Chinese hackberry (*Celtis sinensis*).
- Chinese tallow tree (*Sapium sebiferum*).

While the Board understood the direction of the Council for a preferred tree, plus two alternatives, two species were chosen, sycamore and Chinese pistache, as best suited to meet the desirable street tree criteria for downtown.

These criteria are:

- Large-scale tree with a potential to reach 40' to 60' in height with a 30' to 40' canopy.
- Good natural growth structure with wide branching habits that will form a strong attachment to the trunk.
- Hardy and able to tolerate less-than-ideal growing conditions (i.e., reflected and radiant heat and smog).
- Relatively pest-free.

At the meeting, the Board indicated it wanted additional input from the Downtown Committee and downtown business owners before making a final recommendation to the City Council. Staff met with the Central Business Association (CBA) on November 17 and December 15, 2003 and with the Downtown Committee on December 2, 2003. Staff presented the issues associated with the Idaho locust, including the challenges of growing trees on Castro Street, and identified the two replacement species selected by the Board. While the CBA endorsed the Chinese pistache as the preferred tree for Castro Street, the Downtown Committee did not have a preference. Both groups expressed interest in saving maintenance costs by selecting varieties that have less flower and leaf droppage and are less susceptible to aphids. The visibility of storefront signs and phased replacement were also of interest.

Arborist Report

At the City's request, Barrie D. Coate & Associates, a consulting arborist, completed a report on the condition of the Idaho locust trees on December 9, 2003. Mr. Coate was involved in the original selection of the Idaho locust, and it was felt his review and expertise would be of benefit. The results of the report were later presented to the Board on March 10, 2004 (Attachment 2) and covered a representative selection of trees planted in the 100 through 300 blocks. The report highlighted a significant problem relative to the tree guards not covered in the initial July 2003 staff report. More specifically, the ornamental tree guards installed in the flexible curb parking space to protect the trees from vehicular damage were noted to be abrading the tree trunks approximately 5' above grade. The abrasive nature of the tree trunks rubbing against the metal guards was observed to be damaging the trunk tissue, rendering the trees unhealthy and undermining their structure. Staff suggested that modifying (lowering) the tree guards might be an effective solution to the tree damage issue. Lowering the tree guards would minimize damage to the trunk while still protecting the trees from vehicular damage. The arborist report also recommended several replacement species not considered in the July 2003 report; however, the Board chose not to recommend any of the additional trees as replacements. The Board asked staff to develop a time line for completing the project and to revise the cost estimate to include modification of the tree guards.

The matter was later reagendaized for the Board's review at their April 14, 2004 meeting (Attachment 3), at which time a modified version of the tree guard was presented along with a revised cost estimate. The Board was also asked by staff to consider *Lagerstroemia indica* (crape myrtle) as yet a third possible replacement tree (for landscape accent) and discussed with the Board advantages of a "mixed stand" (multiple species) versus "monoculture" (single species) planting on Castro Street. A mixed stand planting was felt would be less susceptible to disease and environmental stresses, etc., and would provide greater diversity of scale, shade, canopy and seasonal color.

In the final analysis, the Board voted 5-0 to recommend the City Council approve a mixed planting of sycamore, Chinese pistache and crape myrtle trees on Castro Street with sycamores only on the 100, 200, 300 and 900 blocks and a mixed planting of sycamore, Chinese pistache and crape myrtle trees on the remaining blocks. Further, that the plantings occur over a two-year period in order to minimize impact to the downtown.

NEXT STEPS

Subject to the approval of Council, a detailed phasing and planting plan will be developed by staff. A community outreach effort will also be coordinated to inform residents of the purpose, scope and timing of the project.

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ALTERNATIVE

Deny the removal of 170 Idaho locust trees and approve the selected removal and/or replacement of those trees deemed to be damaged or hazardous (approximately 40 trees) and complete modifications to all 170 tree guards.

PUBLIC NOTICING

Agenda posting. Meeting notices were also sent to the Chamber of Commerce, Central Business Association, Downtown Revitalization Committee and to all business and property owners on Castro Street.

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CG/BH/9/CAM
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Attachments: 1. Council Report and Minutes – May 27, 2003
 2. Staff Report – Urban Forestry Board, March 10, 2004
 3. Staff Report – Urban Forestry Board, April 14, 2004